

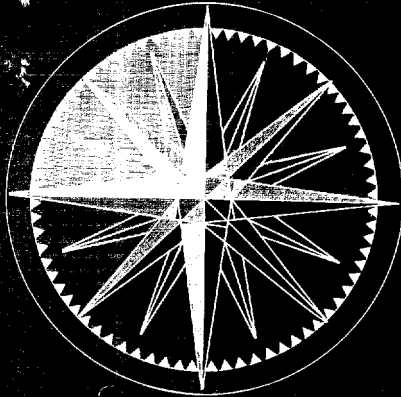
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14 August 1964

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# SPECIAL REPORT

NEW PHASE IN SOVIET-CUBAN RELATIONS WITH THE US

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14 August 1964

**NEW PHASE IN SOVIET-CUBAN RELATIONS WITH THE US**

The culmination of the Soviet strategic disengagement from Cuba, marked by the transfer of control of the anti-aircraft missile system, introduces a new phase in Soviet-Cuban relations with the US. Moscow and Havana opened this round with a concerted political offensive--at the UN and elsewhere--centering on the issues of US overflights and the Guantanamo Naval Base, and they are being careful to allow themselves ample room for maneuver and retreat. If this approach fails to satisfy them, it seems likely that Moscow will promote a tactical line continuing periodic reaffirmation by Castro of his desire for an accommodation with the US and adding measures to heat up the atmosphere. The Soviet-Cuban relationship will be tested in the process, but Soviet patience is virtually assured by the recognition that the mere survival of the Castro regime under manifold US pressures is a substantial achievement for the USSR.

Soviet Support for  
Current Offensive

The Soviet leaders undoubtedly have counseled restraint in future Cuban-US relations, but there is no reason to believe that their hand was forced in the present instance by unexpected unilateral moves by Castro or that they are giving him only grudging support. On the contrary, there is strong circumstantial evidence that the current offensive, beginning with the fishing boats - Guantanamo water incident in early February, is the product of careful advance preparation dating back at least to Castro's visit to Moscow in mid-January.

The question of the transfer of the air defense system to Cuban control and the political

course in dealing with subsequent US overflights was almost certainly a major item on the agenda of Khrushchev's talks at that time with Castro and his artillery chief. The joint communiqué issued after the talks noted that Cuban Army personnel were quickly mastering the "modern military equipment" in their possession and stressed that one of Cuba's most important tasks was to raise its "readiness to rebuff any aggressor."

One of the questions raised by the communiqué was the price Khrushchev may have paid for Castro's endorsement of Soviet positions on three key points at issue with the Chinese Communists. Subsequent events strongly suggest that he promised to support limited Cuban moves against both Guantanamo and the overflights.

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It seems highly unlikely that the Cuban premier would otherwise have risked embarking on such ventures. In any case, the fishing boats incident, which provided Castro with a pretext for cutting off Guantanamo's water supply, occurred just ten days after his return from Moscow.

Timing and Tactics

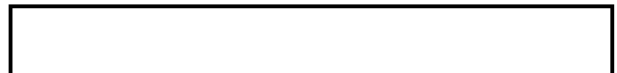
The conduct of that incident and the development of the campaign against the overflights thus far suggest that the Soviets and Cubans envisage a protracted period of agitation and maneuver, not an early showdown on either of these issues. In both cases, they have employed time-tested Communist tactics in creating a synthetic "crisis situation" and then maneuvering to probe the opponents position and pick up any available gains before easing the pressures.

The Soviet leaders, for their part, have never been noted for forbearance when they believe they have caught their opponents in a difficult or untenable position. They apparently agreed with Castro that the riots in Panama in early January created a rich opportunity to agitate against the US presence in Guantanamo with the cry that the 1903 Base Treaty is null and void. On the overflight issue, the withdrawal of thousands of Soviet personnel and the transfer of the surface-to-air missile (SAM) system provided a good opportunity

for striking at US violations of Cuba's "sovereign rights."

The campaign against the overflights followed the classic Communist pattern of public and private warnings--calculated to generate alarm over an imminent collision--accompanied by assurances that the issue could be settled peacefully if the US would grant just concessions to the Cubans. Although Moscow and Havana appeared confident that the US had worked itself into a position untenable in the long run, they probably did not expect that the offensive opened by Castro's 19 April speech on the Bay of Pigs anniversary would force an early curtailment or cessation of the overflights. They almost certainly expected the US to respond with strong reassertions of its right and determination to continue these operations.

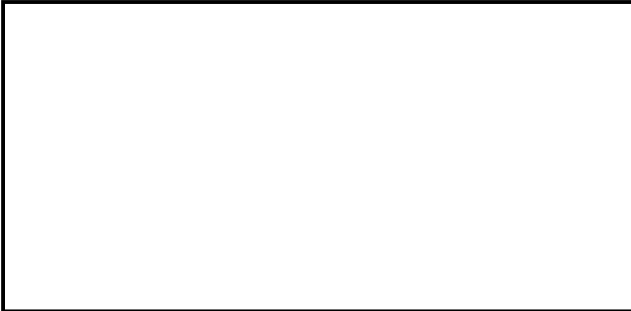
These assertions, they assumed, would alarm many non-Communist governments and create a favorable climate for taking the issue to the United Nations. Public threats were supported by private warnings of an inevitable clash and by hints that the Soviets were genuinely worried. Soviet diplomats at the UN tried to encourage Secretary General Thant to use his good offices toward a peaceful solution.



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By mid-June, it had become clear that this agitation was having little effect. Various Latin American representatives at the UN, for example, expressed disbelief that Castro would take any overt action against US aircraft or would even bring his case before the Security Council in the near future. The pace and strength of Soviet and Cuban pronouncements diminished, and the process of "crisis postponement" replaced tactics of crisis creation.

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On 18 June, Khrushchev told [REDACTED] the USSR would do nothing about the overflights at that time because it did not wish to create difficulties for President Johnson. He insisted, however, that if the overflights continue after the US elections, "Soviet soldiers" would shoot the aircraft down. In early July, Castro took a conciliatory line in his interview with a New York Times correspondent, implying that no action would be taken before November, when Cuba will place its case before the UN General Assembly. Although he

declared that Cuba reserved the right to shoot down US planes, he expressed confidence that the matter would be settled peacefully.

#### Room for Maneuver

The record of this "first round" against the overflights underscores the Soviet-Cuban intention to allow ample room for maneuver and retreat. It is unlikely that there is any precise blueprint or timetable for subsequent rounds. Future tactics will be adjusted in the light of US policy and the emergence of new opportunities.

The extent to which Khrushchev and Castro have engaged their prestige on this issue probably should not be exaggerated. Cold-war experience suggests that Communist leaders do not necessarily feel compelled to make good on their threats in order to avoid the political costs of having bluffs exposed. Repeated Soviet threats and deadlines over the course of the four-year Berlin offensive obviously did not commit Khrushchev's "prestige" as deeply as it appeared to many Western observers. He manipulated pressures and inducements to overcome Western resistance to negotiations and relaxed or withdrew "deadlines" without hesitation when the West consented to talks or when the risks appeared to be approaching a danger point.

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There have been no convincing indications that the Soviet leaders fear some unilateral Cuban act of provocation in an attempt to force a showdown. They undoubtedly have studied Castro's political operations and his consistent skill in maneuver and caution in avoiding head-on collisions from which there is no retreat. In view of the potential hazards involved in the transfer of the SAMs to the Cubans, the Soviets almost certainly worked out at least a general understanding with Castro regarding the use of these weapons.

Apart from any formal agreement, other considerations would discourage Castro from risking some dangerous action on the gamble that the USSR would have no choice but to come to his rescue in the event of US reprisals. In view of Castro's well-known bitterness over Soviet behavior in the missile crisis, it would be surprising if he did not continue to doubt Moscow's willingness to accept serious risks of a direct clash with the US in order to protect Cuba.

Future Tactics

It is doubtful that the Soviets and Cubans at this stage have decided on a subsequent course of action more vigorous than their present political campaign against the overflights. Moscow probably will encourage pe-

riodic reaffirmations by Castro of his desire for an accommodation with the US. In addition, pressure tactics in the next round of their offensive may include well-publicized test-firings of Cuban SAMs and other military displays calculated to increase the credibility of sharper threats.

Meanwhile Moscow and Havana can be expected to make strenuous efforts to rally the support of Afro-Asian UN members for a resolution branding the overflights as illegal and demanding their cessation. They may believe that a General Assembly debate on the matter would be so embarrassing to the US that Washington might consider some form of negotiated settlement to avoid it.

There will almost certainly be successive periods of pressure and relaxation timed to take advantage of developing circumstances and opportunities, but the high stakes involved probably will rule out any prolonged moratorium on agitation. The Soviet and Cuban leaders appear confident that the US must eventually retreat from its claims regarding the legal basis for the overflights. They clearly would make every effort to represent such a retreat as a major US concession and as a long step toward US acceptance of the permanence and legitimacy of the Castro regime.

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Moscow's Goal

Moscow realizes that its only chance of achieving its fundamental aim of ensuring the survival and strengthening of the Castro government is to continue its persistent efforts to bring about a relaxation of US pressures and economic boycott. In the Soviet view of the global competition with the US (and with Communist China), the fact that the Castro regime continues to survive despite these pressures is a substantial achievement. The Soviets have long attempted to draw world attention to it by stressing that the "invincibility of the freedom island" lies in the courage of its heroic people and in the support of the socialist countries. For Moscow, the historic significance of the Cuban revolution is that it brought the "beacon light of Communism" to the Western Hemisphere.

Because of the great value the Soviets attach to Castro's ties with the Soviet bloc, they can be expected to maintain a patient and tolerant attitude in their dealings with Cuba. Great dissimilarities in experience and temperament inevitably have produced frequent strains in Soviet-Cuban relations. In addition to Cuba's natural uneasiness during a period of detente in US-Soviet relations, frictions could arise from any efforts by Castro to exploit

the Sino-Soviet conflict to gain greater Soviet assistance or from conflicting tactics and ambitions vis-a-vis Latin American Communist parties.

The Soviet leaders over the past decade have accumulated considerable experience in dealing with such difficult egotists as Sukarno, Ben Bella, and Nasir, as well as certain Communist statesmen closer to home. There is no reason to believe they will allow occasional exasperation with Castro's pretensions and administrative methods to override their basic interest in supporting his regime.

Neither the Soviets nor the Cubans are above circulating rumors and reports of mutual hostility and disillusionment as part of the effort to enhance Cuba's professed ability and desire to pursue an "independent" policy directed toward closer economic and political ties with non-Communist countries. It is conceivably more than a coincidence that within a few days after Castro assured a New York Times correspondent in early July of Cuba's desire for extensive talks with the US and acknowledged that Cuban "passion and extremism" were partly responsible for the break in US-Cuban relations, the Soviet ambassador assured [redacted]

[redacted] that Castro was a changed man and anxious for an accommodation with the US. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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